

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Tuesday 31 October 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird

Mr R Gale

Ms M Hutchison

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Niven (remote)

In attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager

Ms A Jansson, Area Education & Learning Manager

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operation Manager

Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Manager

Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer

Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander M Leavey, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr R Gale in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report
Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There been circulated Report No SCC/17/23 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- further information was sought on the nature of the deliberate fire highlighted in the report;
- concern at the station availability in the Lochinver, Scourie and Tongue areas. In response, an update was provided on progress to resolve the issues with staffing including creating a virtual station to provide for joint mobilisation between areas and continuing targeted recruitment efforts;

- the need to better understand the issues around the retention of firefighters to address the loss of staff experienced over the past ten years;
- an issue with water pressure in hydrants in Durness be further investigated;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Service had been allocated a flat rate budget for the next four years and decisions on any reductions in resources would be made by the Local Senior Officer for the Highland area;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Group Commander had addressed the issue around the Service being represented at the Sutherland Community Partnership going forward;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the reasons for the station availability at Bonar Bridge and the work ongoing to improve the situation;
- concern there would be no immediate replacement for the station commanders particularly given the issues with availability in some areas and that this point be raised with the Service's Group Commander and Local Senior Officers; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that where no ambulance was available the Service would respond locally to calls for slips, trips and falls in communities.

The Station Commander confirmed that he would provide Members with responses to the points raised where he did not have the information to provide an answer at the meeting.

Thereafter, the Chair wished the Station Commander a long and happy retirement and wished him well for the future.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

**4. Education HMI Update – Sutherland
Tongue Primary and Nursery Class
Cunntas às Ùr Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlaim – Cataibh
Bun-Sgoil agus Clas Sgoil-Àraich Thunga**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/18/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members congratulated Tongue Primary School and Nursery Class on the excellent report received.

In response to a question, the Area Education and Learning Manager advised that while there had been no specific mention in the report of the fact the School was part of the North Coast 3-18 Campus, further information on this aspect would be provided at a ward business meeting and the Headteacher invited to attend.

The Committee **NOTED** the key strengths and next steps for Tongue Primary School and Nursery Class as reported by Education Scotland on 6 June 2023.

6. Review of Winter Gritting Route Priorities in Lochinver Area Ath-sgrùdadh air Prìomhachasan Slighe airson Sailleadh Gearraidh ann an Sgìre Loch an Inbhir

There had been circulated Report No SCC/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the challenges in providing the winter service in Assynt were recognised and the fact there was not the available resources to re-prioritise the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road to secondary route status;
- the above proposal had been raised on the basis it was considered there would be no cost implications as it was hoped the route could be done in the early morning rather than as an 'other' route later in the day;
- the request for the route to be re-prioritised had been brought to local Members by Assynt Community Council and it was disappointing this could not be achieved. The Community Council had also indicated that the reprioritisation of the U1053 Achmelvich Road from "Secondary" to "Other" was unacceptable and it was proposed this recommendation be deleted from the report;
- the aim of the proposed reprioritisation had been to ensure school pupils and teachers could travel to school in a safe environment. It was vital there was safe access to school, work and social opportunities in terms of the wider issue of attracting young families to live in the area and concern was expressed around the equity of the winter service provision in the area;
- the policy was flawed as there were fragile communities that did not have a public bus service and therefore Members request that the Council's Winter Service Policy be reviewed in respect of Sutherland to prioritise school routes;
- it was important to recognise that the Roads Operations Manager and Team were operating within resource and policy constraints; and
- the status quo in terms of the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road be maintained in the Winter Service Plan 2023/24 as presented to the Committee in August 2023.

The Committee:

- NOTED** the impact of increasing "Secondary" route priorities for the delivery of the winter service to "Other" routes and pre-treatment routes;
- NOTED** the additional plant and labour resource required to deliver the increase in Secondary routes as detailed in Section 9 of this report;
- NOTED** that following extensive review of winter maintenance operations, it is not possible to re-prioritise the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road to secondary route status, in view of the impacts on other routes, and the resource implications as highlighted in the report, and therefore **AGREED** that the status quo be maintained in relation to this route in the Winter Service Plan 2023/24; and
- * **AGREED** to request that the Council's Winter Service Policy be reviewed in respect of Sutherland to prioritise school routes.

**7. Old Caithness Road, Helmsdale – One Way Traffic Regulation Order
Seann Rathad Ghallaibh, Bun Iliadh – Òrdugh Riaghladh Trafaig Aon Slighe**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members commented that Helmsdale Community Council and other parties had been involved in the proposal for some period of time and a significant amount of work had been undertaken to date to deliver a solution that would allow children to safely cross the road at this location.

Thereafter, a point was raised in relation to the positive impact Helmsdale Hostel had on the local tourist and hospitality economy and the opportunity to have on-site parking at the Hostel. This would be on an extensive area to the west of the premises with a permissible access onto Old Caithness Road to mitigate against any negative effects on the business associated with the Order, subject to the owners obtaining planning consent.

The Road Safety Manager advised this was a Transport Scotland scheme and they had offered to provide a signage route to the Hostel through Helmsdale. The Order would result in the road being one way and this would free up space to allow marked parking bays on Old Caithness Road to be provided as part of the scheme for use by the Hostel. She provided an assurance that the provision of these marked parking bays would be delivered at the same time as the overall scheme and that they could be provided without compromising safety.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed One-Way System Traffic Regulation Order and the representations received;
- ii. **NOTED** and considered the objections made to “The Highland Council (C1019 Old Caithness Road), Helmsdale (One Way), Traffic Regulation Order 2022” and **APPROVED** the making of the One-Way System Traffic Regulation Order; and
- iii. **NOTED** the intention to monitor the area after the introduction of the One-Way System including commissioning a traffic survey to determine effectiveness of the new road layout.

**8. Sutherland HRA Capital Programme Update and 23-27
Programme
Prògram Calpa HRA 2023-2027**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, an update was sought on the performance of new air source heating systems in Council houses and the benefits being delivered to tenants. It was confirmed that specific examples of recent installations would be brought to a future ward business meeting. Significant uplifts in the energy efficiency associated

with recent installations in the area had been observed and Mr J McGillivray would be provided with further information in this regard.

Thereafter, Members queried whether any resistance was being encountered or concerns raised from tenants being asked to convert to air source heating. In response, an update was provided on the advice and information being provided to tenants in advance of systems being installed. Tenants were also referred to a third party energy advice organisation to ensure they were maximising the benefits from the system. Feedback was gathered from tenants who had received this type of installation and this was used to help explain the benefits to other tenants.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the summary update on the HRA Capital Programme at section 5 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the HRA Capital resources identified for Sutherland area at 6.7;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed investment priorities in the HRA Capital Programme for Sutherland 2023-27 as set out in Appendix 1; and
- iv. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme will continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee.

9. **Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ràitheil Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the community projects may go into abeyance pending the community council elections and formation of the new Dornoch Area Community Council and consideration of their priorities;
- following investment in some major projects there may now be a lull in major outlays from the Fund;
- in terms of income, it was anticipated the turf for the new Royal Dornoch Golf Club Clubhouse would be cut in November 2023 and therefore the payment of additional rent of up to £25,000 was expected, dependent on a minimum threshold of visitor numbers;
- the major risk to the Fund was the Dornoch Burn which was a burden and had to be maintained; and
- the Fund had been well managed and delivered best value and significant benefits for Dornoch as a whole. The Ward Manager and other officers were thanked for their work in relation to the Fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. position of Dornoch Common Good fund at the end of the second quarter FY 23/24; and
- ii. update on current Dornoch Common Good issues.

**9. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

**North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget
applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved since 1 April 2023:

Lairg Community Council - Lairg Bird Hide upgrade: £2,000.00
Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds: £800.00
Farr Youth Development – High Life Highland - Day Trip to Durness: £240.00
The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange:
£500.00
Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust - Kyle Feeds: £1,000.00
Lairg & District Community Initiative - Replace Flag Pole: £500.00
North West Training Centre - Learning Programme 23-24: £1,750.00
TYKES - Programme of Residential Respite: £1,240.00
Farr Edge 2000 - Continue Service: £2,500.00

**East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications
approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved since 1 April 2023:

Clyne Heritage Society – Aultcraggie Roundhouses Archaeological Excavation:
£500.00
Dornoch Bowling Club – Victorian Benches: £700.00
East Sutherland Camera Club – Highland Challenge 2023: £600.00
Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds: £800.00
Go Golspie - Caretaker Post: £500.00
The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange:
£500.00
Dornoch Academy - Edinburgh Book Festival Literacy Trip: £1,175.00
The Embo Trust - Old School Reset: £600.00
HLH Dornoch Youth Services Summer Activity Programme: £1,000.00
Tykes - Programme of Respite Residential: £3,000.00

**12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 8 August 2023, which were approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

The meeting concluded at 11.50am.